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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 001688

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MO](#) [WS](#)

SUBJECT: MOROCCO COMMITTED TO NEXT ROUND OF SAHARA TALKS,
BUT NOT YET READY TO FIX A DATE

REF: RABAT 1671

Classified by DCM Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: MFA Chief of Staff and I/O Chief Nasser Bourita confirmed PolCouns November 1 Morocco's determination to pursue UN-sponsored negotiations with the POLISARIO Front, and to clarify the issue of time and place for the next round. He said this can only begin when Morocco's new government is fully in place, a process he claimed was not yet complete. Bourita affirmed that Morocco recognized the POLISARIO as its negotiating partner and was not trying to undermine it by sending pro-Moroccan Sahrawis to the negotiations, but it would never accept that the POLISARIO is the sole representative of the Sahrawis. End summary.

TIME AND PLACE

¶2. (C) MFA Chief of Staff and I/O Chief Nasser Bourita summoned PolCouns to the Ministry on the morning of November ¶1. Brandishing copies of correspondence to and from Van Walsum, Bourita insisted that previous discussion of time and place for the next round of talks between Morocco and the POLISARIO had only been a question posed by Van Walsum, not a proposition, which required consultations. As noted in the Manhasset communique, the parties had agreed to consult on a time and place. Morocco did not have those consultations yet, said Bourita.

¶3. (C) Bourita indicated that when Van Walsum met with then-minister Benaissa in New York on September 24, the UNSYG's Personal Representative he had posed "questions" about the timing and location asking Moroccan views about Switzerland. Two days later then-Minister-delegate Fassi Fihri spoke on the phone with Van Walsum to provide a preliminary response confirmed by a letter from the MFA on October 9. The Moroccans laid out in the letter their formal process of government formations, which depended on a vote of confidence held only on October 31, but which still has not fully run its course, he said, declining to specify an end date. The GOM and MFA would only then be able to begin consultations, and would very soon be ready to initiate that process. He hoped Van Walsum would at that point move to pursue formal consultations.

¶4. (C) On locations, Bourita allowed that Switzerland was mentioned but emphasized that no formal invitation had been received. Morocco had received, as had the UN, an offer from Austria to host the talks as well as from a third country, perhaps Portugal. Morocco is not in principle opposed to Switzerland but has not agreed. Morocco had requested

consultations with Van Walsum to resolve the question of place and date of the meeting.

15. (C) Bourita noted that Van Walsum himself had limited his offer of timing to December 8, citing personal commitments. While the POLISARIO has announced publicly its agreement to November in Geneva, in September their negotiator Bieissat had said they would go to Geneva in January. Bourita said Morocco wanted to make sure that consultations were going on with both sides, and refused to negotiate or be pressured through POLISARIO press statements.

AND SUBSTANCE

16. (C) On substance, Bourita said Van Walsum should look closely at the October 31 UNSC resolution, and particularly its new elements. He also wanted Van Walsum to take account of the nonsymmetrical treatment of the two efforts and to focus the talks, as the USG had originally proposed, on the Moroccan autonomy plan. Van Walsum should not pretend as he seems to do that the proposals are equal.

17. (C) Bourita believed the resolution's mention of events since June 2006 was a specific reference to the Moroccan initiative, the King's formation of the CORCAS, and the autonomy plan. This could hardly be a reference to the POLISARIO proposal, which was put together in four hours.

18. (C) On representation, Bourita stated Morocco seeks not to undercut the POLISARIO; it has agreed to negotiate with it and that the POLISARIO is the party with which a political agreement will be concluded. What Morocco does not agree to,

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he said, is the POLISARIO claim to exclusivity of representation of the Sahrawi people. The existence of the CORCAS reflects the fact that many Sahrawis support and even hold positions in the Government of Morocco, which is why they are an essential part of the Moroccan delegation. Although formally in the UN process, their existence is not to be denied, he underscored.

COMMENT

19. (C) The formal installation of the Moroccan government indeed has taken some time, but appears to us to be essentially complete. The PM's office has informed us that since the vote of confidence has been held (septel), formal meetings with him and his cabinet could begin next week.

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